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ABSTRACT

A program developed at West Virginia University trains special education teachers to be collaborative consultants to general educators implementing inclusive education. From 1991 to 1994, 30 special education teachers completed requirements in two areas of specialization for teaching students with mild disabilities. In addition, they completed a 10-week internship that included working with general educators in interactive teams to facilitate the inclusion of special needs students in the regular classroom. Over the course of the project, approximately 135 general education teachers and 10 administrators in northern West Virginia were involved in teaming and staff development focusing on the curricular needs and behavior management of mildly disabled students. Participating general educators registered for a three-credit seminar that took place at their home school. The seminars met on a weekly basis and focused on discussion of problem students. In addition, general educators kept a daily log of team activities, cooperative teaching, and collaboration with the special education intern. Pretest/posttest measurements of general educators' attitudes toward inclusive education and teacher collaboration revealed positive changes. Results suggest that when general education teachers are provided training and supportive services from a collaborative consultant, their attitudes, skills, and willingness to participate in collaborative interactions involving inclusion of disabled students can be positively influenced. (LP)

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# INCLUDING GENERAL EDUCATORS IN INCLUSION

Nationally, there has been increasing emphasis on providing appropriate, well coordinated educational support for students with learning and behavioral problems within general education classrooms and curricula. The number of students with disabilities taught in general education settings has increased every year since the inception of 94-142 in 1975. The latest U.S. Department of Education report to Congress (1994) reports that over 70% of the 4.6 million 6-21 year old student students with disabilities are being taught in general education classrooms. Thirty-five percent of these students spend the entire school day in general education classes, another 36% are enrolled in mainstream settings on a part-time/resource room basis. All indications are that this trend will continue to grow as the term "inclusion" continues to be one of the "hot" topics in education.

Critics of inclusion complain the increasing reliance on general educators to assume responsibility for disabled and at-risk children demands an effective support system that takes into consideration shared input, responsibility, and decision making between general and special educators--a collaborative support system which is not in place in many educational settings. Further, neither special educators nor regular class teachers have been prepared for this growing need for interaction between them. Collaboration necessitates high level training in collaborative problem solving skills, the mastery of questioning, listening, and organizing skills; familiarity with the regular curriculum, demands of large group instruction, curriculum adaptation, and behavioral change.

The success of inclusive schooling efforts is largely dependent on the general education teachers' ability and willingness to make appropriate modifications to accommodate individual differences (Madden & Slavin, 1983). Professional opportunities to enhance general and special education teachers' confidence in instructing students with disabilities in general education settings are warranted (Schumm, Vaughn, Gordon & Rothlein, 1994). Research also indicates that professional growth initiatives need to take into account teachers' beliefs and considerations (Richardson, Anders, Tidwell & Lloyd, 1991). The purpose of this proceeding is to present findings from a federally funded initiative to train special education teachers as collaborative consultants. Specifically, data on participating general education teachers' attitudes, skills and



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understanding of roles in a collaborative teaching model, before and after experiences with interactive teaming and availability of a consultant teacher intern, are narrated.

## Training Program

### Description of Collaborative Consultant Training for Special Educators

From 1991 to 1994, the Special Education Department in the College of Human Resources and Education at West Virginia University, conducted a teacher training project designed to train 30 special education teachers to serve as collaborative consultants. The trainees acquired two areas of specialization in the education of students with mild disabilities and were required to fulfill a 10-week internship. The internship training included working with general educators in interactive teams to facilitate the inclusion of special needs students in the regular classroom. Over the course of the project, approximately 135 general education teachers and 10 administrators were involved in teaming and staff development focusing on problem solving the curricular needs and behavior management of mildly disabled students. Participating teachers were located in Northern West Virginia schools and included elementary through high school settings.

### Description of General Education Teacher Training

Participating general educators registered for a three credit seminar which took place at their home school. The seminars met on a weekly basis following school for two and one-half hours, were informal, and focused on discussion of problem students for whom everybody shared responsibility. The seminars served as staff development in communication and problem-solving techniques/strategies for addressing the needs of targeted student behaviors. Participation was voluntary and commitments included keeping a daily log of team activities, cooperative teaching, and dyad collaboration with the intern. A university supervisor was present at all seminar meetings.

## Instruments

### Attitude

A 16 item *Teacher Opinions* survey instrument developed by Larrivee and Cook (1983) was adapted and used to sample how general education teachers felt about having children with disabilities in their classrooms. Teachers responded to each question on a Likert-type scale of 1-5 (one = high score of agreement). The survey was administered before and after the seminar as a pre/posttest measures.

### Skills

An eight item *Assessment of Skills for Teachers* instrument was adapted from Morsink, Thomas & Correa (1991) and administer to general education teachers to assess skills perception of skills acquired during the training received throughout the intern placement and seminar experience. A Likert-type scale of 1-5 was used to determine the degree to which the general education teachers felt they could demonstrate the skill. The survey was administered before and after the intern and seminar experience as a pre/posttest measure.

### Roles of General and Special Educators

A twenty item *Consultation Model Preference Scale* developed by West (1985) was used to determine which consultation style teachers preferred. This instrument was administered to collect pre/posttest data on the participants perceptions of roles of general and special education teachers in the consultation relationship.

## Results

Changes in attitude towards teaching students with disabilities, perceived teaching skills and understanding of roles in collaborative interactions were investigated using Wilk's Lambda MANOVA analysis and unpaired t-tests to test for levels of significance.

### Attitudes

The data indicates that some attitudes can be changed to promote greater acceptance of students with disabilities in the mainstream. Statistically significant changes at the $p=.05$ level were recorded in the following areas: (1) The needs of academically handicapped students can (not) best be served through special separate classes ($p=.014$); (2) the extra attention special needs students require will not be to the detriment of the other students ($p=.007$); (3) students with disabilities will not develop academic skills more rapidly in special classrooms ($p=.024$); (4) collaborative projects of this kind will improve communication between special and general education teachers ($p=.013$); and (5) given extra training and support for teachers, class size could remain approximately the same if students with mild disabilities are served through the regular class ($p=.002$).

Noteworthy statements general education teachers agreed with on pre and posttest measures and thus were not statistically significant include: (1) Many things general education teachers do with nondisabled students are appropriate for students with special needs; (2) academic growth will be promoted due to the challenge of being in regular classrooms;

(3) mixed group interactions will lead to acceptance and understanding; (4) emotional and social needs of special needs students can best be met in the regular classroom; and (5) regular education students will benefit when students with special needs are included in the classroom.

**Skills**

Data collected from the general education teacher participants on the self-perception of skills indicate a statistically significant change in all eight areas addressed. Reported skill levels increased in the following: (1) Use of positive motivational strategies ($p=<.0001$); (2) analysis of materials according to appropriateness of students ($p=<.0001$); (3) development of appropriate lesson plans ($p=.0008$); (4) classroom scheduling ($p=.0091$); (5) responses to cultural differences ($p=.0041$); (6) resolving behavioral difficulties between students ($p=.0162$); (7) developing intervention plans for deviant behaviors ($p=.0003$); and (8) identifying specific teaching materials to meet needs of a given exceptionally ($p=<.0001$).

**Roles of General and Special Educators**

The data indicate that the general education teachers had a high level of agreement with the basic tenets of collaboration on both pre and posttest measures. However, there still was an overall statistically significant change ($p=.006$) favoring stronger agreement. Additionally statistically significant changes were noted with the following statements: (1) the consultant and I should both identify the problem based on information we have collected ($p=.012$); (2) the consultant and I may each implement some of the recommendations ($p=.005$); (3) the consultant and I should both suggest intervention recommendations which we will both implement ($p=.001$); and (4) the consultant and I should engage in continuous follow-up to modify the intervention recommendations if necessary ($p=.006$).

## Discussion/Implications

The findings indicate that when general education teachers are provided training, supportive services through a collaborative consultant, an in-house team of teachers, and a designated time to meet, positive changes in attitude, skills and willingness to participate in collaborative interactions can be recorded. The use of an on-the-job training model for general education teachers in their home schools is supported by the data. The changes in general education teachers' responses on the posttest measures are in part attributed to the use of on-going seminars to directly problem-solve targeted student academic and behavior concerns. Specific real-life classroom problems were addressed through practical and immediately applicable strategies and interventions which were supported by

the guidance and assistance of a consultant trainee. General education teachers were accepting of the "how to" strategies they (general education teachers with consultant trainee) helped develop and apply in their classrooms. The findings, however, must be interpreted with caution as all general education teachers in this study volunteered to participate. Regardless, the results have implications regarding the structuring of staff development activities and the structuring of teacher time to enhance the academic and behavioral performance of students with special needs in general education settings. This study shows that with relevant on-the-job training, general education teacher attitudes, perception of skills, and willingness to participate in collaborative interactions regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities can be positively influenced. However, further research is needed to determine if this training approach will effect teacher behavior (use of developed skills) and ultimately what effects, if any, this will have on performance of all students in the general education setting.

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